

you unless you stake it." A Blaine County Deputy Sheriff reported water 5 or 6 feet deep in Zurich Park. The deputy said two elderly people from Washington were rescued from the park. He reported their travel trailer was flooded and "there was about a foot left before the water went over the top. And that's a fact." A *Billings Gazette* reporter observed "from the air the Milk River and its tributaries resembled chains of shallow lakes as fields and meadows were flooded, stock reservoirs filled, and ancient buffalo wallows were marked by sheets of muddy water." It is probable that flooding was greater than a 100-year magnitude on Thirty-Mile Creek in Harlem and Battle Creek east of Chinook. This would make it the worst flooding ever recorded along those streams. Many residents said the flooding was as bad or worse than the 1952 flood along the Milk River.

For a Turner woman the full terror of the flood was realized. Gordon and Jeannine Skones were driving south from Turner on State Highway 241 when flood waters from Rock Coulee Creek forced them to abandon their car. They were swept away by the current. Gordon Skones reached the safety of a tree and was rescued six hours later suffering from hypothermia, but Jeannine Skones drowned.

Evacuations and flood fighting efforts were carried out. Over 350 residents were evacuated from the Chinook, Harlem, and Malta area. Chinook reported 125 residents were evacuated; 150 were evacuated from Harlem. Residents on the north side of Chinook were alerted on Friday and sandbagging began. Extensive sandbagging was carried out in Malta to reinforce their dike and protect other areas of town. Local volunteers assisted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Montana National Guard, and Disaster and Emergency Services placed 35,000 to 38,000 sandbags. Straw bales wrapped in sheets of plastic were used along slow-moving areas of the Milk River. The flood fighting efforts in Malta greatly reduced the amount of potential damage. In Saco a 24-hour watch was kept to monitor the flood waters along the dike surrounding the town. The waters never entered Saco.

Blaine, Hill, Phillips, Valley, McCone, and Rosebud counties have all received state and federal disaster declarations. Damage to residences in Harlem, Malta, and Chinook was extensive. In Phillips and Blaine counties a survey found 39 homes were completely destroyed, 172 residences suffered major damage, and 298 houses sustained minor damage. It is estimated that 38 mobile homes were completely destroyed by the flood in these areas.



The car driven by Gordon and Jeannine Skones lies almost submerged in Rock Coulee Creek. Jeannine Skones of Turner was drowned when she and her husband were forced by flood waters to abandon their car.

Unfortunately, most residents of these communities were uninsured. There was only one flood insurance policy in effect in Harlem, three policies in Chinook, three policies in Malta, two policies in Blaine County, and five policies in Phillips County. One Harlem area resident summed it up. "I'm an insurance agent, but we can't afford flood insurance, especially after four years of drought. A lot of people are in the same mess we are. We'll probably have to depend on some sort of disaster aid."

Some estimates show the heaviest losses (\$26 million) occurred to agriculture. Harvested hay, stored wheat and other crops, livestock, fields, and farm machinery all suffered. In Rosebud County many irrigation

structures, irrigation canals, ditches, and reservoirs were damaged or destroyed. Damage to public facilities — roads, bridges, culverts, sewer and water systems, and irrigation districts — totaled \$1.3 million.

Individuals who suffered from the flood had various reflections on their own personal losses. One Hi-Line woman said, "We lost a lot of our best things. But we are alive, we can just thank the Lord we are alive." A Harlem woman could not be so optimistic about her future. "I'm tired and I really don't want to face any of it. I'm at the point where I don't want to go back. I don't want to see what's happened to my home." A Glasgow area man put it simply. "You just can't ever forget the power of the river."

Workshops planned for next spring

We know everyone likes to get out of the office in the spring for a worthwhile cause. We are hoping to do just that with our spring workshops. The floodplain management staff will be making presentations at one-day workshops covering flood loss reduction, floodplain management, emergency response, and flood forecasting. Others involved in putting on the workshops will be the State Disaster and Emergency Services Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Weather Service. These comprehensive workshops will feature several speakers involved in flood loss

reduction. Various presentations will be given in the morning and demonstrations and group participation in emergency sandbagging, diking, and other measures will be held in the afternoon.

The workshops are tentatively planned for March or April. Three or possibly four workshops will be held at locations around the state which seem to be most threatened by spring flooding. The National Weather Service will research threatened areas. If flood threats are not apparent, the workshops will be held at central locations around the state.

The Hi-Line flood proved a point

After the waters went down the High Water newsletter wanted to get some first hand information on the effects of emergency response and floodplain management on the September Hi-Line flooding. We talked to the mayors of Malta and Harlem to get their views. Mayor Garry Adams of Malta and Mayor Dave Boisvert of Harlem were in charge of emergency response for their communities.

Adams and Boisvert were both satisfied with the local level response to the flood emergency, and were pleased with the way everyone in their communities pitched in to help. Malta received considerable assistance from the state and regional Montana Disaster and Emergency Service. The Montana National Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers responded to Malta's requests for help within a few hours. The State Disaster and Emergency Service and Corps of Engineers provided valuable direction in Malta on sandbagging, emergency diking, and other flood fighting techniques. In Harlem, officials received help from the local, regional, and state Disaster Offices but Boisvert commented

they could have used more outside offers of help and technical advice, especially for emergency evacuation. Boisvert did say Malmstrom Air Force Base sent a helicopter to aid in evacuation, which was very helpful, although Harlem officials made the request.

Harlem and Malta both had emergency response plans already in place. In Harlem

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they have an "Incident Command System," of which Mayor Boisvert is the Commander. Boisvert recommends to all communities that they develop an incident command system, and says, the system "saved our bacon; we could have had more fatalities." Boisvert said many communities "never figure they will

have a disaster; they keep putting a plan off, or develop a plan and don't look at it again or train people?" He pointed out that in the Harlem area "people in this end of the county understand the system." In Harlem flash-flood conditions left no time to evacuate before the water hit. Residents carried out search and rescue operations. Adams said Malta has "practiced emergency response drills but never for floods." The fire department had a procedure for emergency response but didn't know how to sandbag. Malta had an evacuation plan and this worked well, according to Adams. In Malta they carried out preventive evacuation in case the levee failed. Both mayors said everyone was caught by surprise because they didn't expect flooding to occur in the fall.

Boisvert said Harlem is pleased with their response system and will not be making major changes except to "look at a quicker way to evacuate the northside." Adams said Malta will be working on setting up a monitoring system for key tributaries north of town. With help from the National Weather Service they will set up staff gages on several bridges; volunteers in the community will monitor water stages during periods of high runoff or heavy rains. The National Weather Service will estimate at what water levels they need to begin warning people and at what levels they

"I don't understand people building in the floodway. It's hard to convince them they could lose everything."

should begin evacuating. Adams said that as a result of the flooding they found out the Bureau of Reclamation already had a gaging system set up for the Milk River. Adams added that the city is going to participate in the Army Corps of Engineers emergency flood response training this winter to prepare for possible spring flooding.

When questioned about the merits of floodplain management Adams said "I don't understand people building in the floodway. It is hard to convince them they could lose everything." He thinks that local residents "will have a different view of floodplain management now." The "flood proved a point" to everyone. Boisvert said in Harlem he thinks the "northside is still a viable area to develop" but they will "keep people out of the floodway."



Photo by Larry Mayer, Billings Gazette

A custom combiner from Oklahoma removes his belongings from a flooded trailer on the north side of Harlem. Earlier, flood waters reached at least half way up the trailer.

Floodplain ordinance revisions are required

On October 1, 1986 changes went into effect for the regulations of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Every community participating in the NFIP received a copy of the Federal Register containing the rule changes. Communities also received a letter requesting their floodplain development ordinance be revised to include the rule changes by April 1, 1987. The most important rule changes are listed below.

- Mobile homes are now called "manufactured homes" and defined as: a structure transportable in one or more sections, which is built on a permanent chassis and is designed for use with or without a permanent foundation when connected to utilities. This includes park trailers, travel trailers, and other similar vehicles placed on a site for more than 180 consecutive days.
- All manufactured homes in the Floodplain (zones A1-A30, AH, & AE) must be **elevated** when initially installed, replaced, or substantially improved. The manufactured home must be elevated regardless of the adoption date of the ordinance or

when the trailer park was established. This eliminates the "grandfather clause" for mobile homes.

The biggest impact of these rule changes will be on mobile (manufactured) home park owners. Initial placement or "alteration" of mobile homes has never been allowed in a designated floodway. Replacement of mobile homes in the floodway within an existing mobile home park or subdivision was allowed with proper anchoring. The new NFIP rules now call for elevating mobile homes replaced in floodways, but the Montana Floodplain and Floodway Management Act does not allow fill in the floodway for such purposes. Since communities participating in the NFIP must follow the NFIP regulations and also comply with state floodplain laws, mobile homes can no longer be replaced in floodways in Montana.

We realize that the regulation that does not allow manufactured home park owners to replace units in the floodway may be difficult to enforce. The intent of the NFIP rule change is to require replacement mobile homes to be elevated in both the floodway fringe and

floodway if it does not cause an increase in the base flood elevation. We will be considering various options to bring the state law in line with the intent of the NFIP rules. We propose to request that the Montana Board of Natural Resources and Conservation revise the state's Administrative Rules. One option would allow limited fill in the floodway to elevate replacement mobile homes in existing mobile home parks. However, allowing limited fill in the floodway presents problems too, so we will be considering other alternatives as well.

Any Administrative Rule changes will take at least until April. In the meantime model ordinances will be developed for your use. We will keep you posted on our progress and on how to proceed with the ordinance revisions you may formulate.

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